6: Wied-Neuwied T-5 (1832-1834) 1843 NQ17 Mandan NQ17

778 281 [435] nose, hoofs, and tail. The value of ten to fifteen horses is given for it. A certain Mandan gave ten horses, a gun, some kettles, and other articles, for such a hide. The white hide of a bull or of an old cow is by no means so valuable. The white hide of a young cow suffices for all the daughters of a family. They do not wear it as a robe, like the Manitaries, or, at the utmost, the wife, or one of the daughters of the family, wears it once at some great festival, but never a second time. The Mandans have particular ceremonies at the dedication of the hide. As soon as they 796 have obtained it they engage an eminent medicine man, who must throw it over him; he then walks round the village in the apparent direction of the sun's course, and sings a medicine song. When the owner, after collecting articles of value for three or four years, desires to offer his treasure to the lord of life, or to the first man, he rolls it up, after adding some wormwood or a head of maize, and the skin then remains suspended on a high pole till it rots away. At the time of my visit there was such an offering at Mih-Tutta-Hang-Kush, near the stages for the dead without the village. Sometimes, when the ceremony of dedication is finished, the hide is cut into small strips, and the members of the family wear parts of it tied over the head, or across the 554 224 forehead, when they are in full dress. If a Mandan kills a young white buffalo cow, it is accounted to him as more than an exploit, or having killed an enemy. He does not cut up the animal himself, but employs another man, to whom he gives a horse for his trouble. He alone who has killed such an animal is allowed to wear a narrow strip of the skin in his ears. The whole robe is not ornamented, being esteemed superior to any other dress, however fine. The [435] traders have, sometimes, sold such hides to the Indians, who gave them as many as sixty other [136] robes in exchange. Buffalo skins with white spots are likewise highly valued by the Mandans; but there is a race of these animals with very soft silky hair, which has a beautiful gold lustre when in the sunshine: these are, likewise, highly prized, and sold for ten or fifteen dollars, and, 778 sometimes, for the value of a horse. Besides the white buffalo skins which are offered in sacrifice and hung on poles, there are, in the vicinity of the villages of the Mandans and Manitaries, other strange figures on high poles, as represented in Plate XXV. These figures are composed of skin, grass, and twigs, which, it seems, represent the sun and moon, perhaps, also, the lord of life, and the first man. The Indians resort to them when they wish to petition for anything, and sometimes howl and lament for days and weeks together.

796 The Mandans have several medicine festivals, of which the Okippe, or the penitential ceremony of the ark, is by far the most remarkable. It is celebrated in the spring or summer, and I regret to say that I cannot describe it as an eye-witness. I am, however, enabled to give a circumstantial description of it, word for word, as it was communicated to me by men initiated in the mysteries of the nation.*

* The author refers to a letter on this subject, written by Mr. Catlin, and published in a New York paper; but this is by no means so complete as that given in his valuable work published last year.—*Translator's Note.*